

To the BOOKSELLERS of London and Westminster.

GENTLEMEN,

WE observe with Concern, that the Mode of delivering our Letter of Address and List of Prices to you, does not meet with your Approbation, nor give that Satisfaction we earnestly wished and hoped it might; we can only say, that we followed the same Mode in our late Address, as that which had not given Offence in two preceding ones, when the Prices were raised. We are very sensible, that our Cause wants no Exaggeration, and we should have been very willing to have adopted any other Method that would have given more Satisfaction. We flattered ourselves, from repeated Reports that have been spread abroad, that we should have had an Opportunity, by a select Number from our Body, to have met you in Conference on the Subject, when, we doubted not, but that we should have been able to have convinced the most determined Gentleman against us, that we had advanced nothing but Truths, and have prevented that List of respectable Names in associating against us. But as we have not been favored with that Opportunity, we would, with Submission, answer the few Objections that have come to our Notice. As Leather must always take the lead in the Expenses of Binding, and the Rise of that Article has been very considerable within these few Months, it naturally was the first Article in our Address; it does not follow from that, that it is the only Grievance that we suffer; no, Gentlemen, we have many other, and great Inconveniences to labor under in the Trade of Bookbinding. It has been objected by many respectable Gentlemen among you, that Leather is no dearer now, than it was at our last Rise. If it were not, yet, there are other Expenses of Pasteboard, Paper, Labor, &c. which are alone sufficient to swallow up the small Profits of our Trade, without considering the Rise of Leather. Some Gentlemen among you have complained of our giving our Journeymen so much Wages, when our Profits are so small. We would offer to your Consideration three Causes that have contributed to that End, and we hope it will be found on Enquiry, that it was out of our Power to have done otherwise. The first Cause that increased the Price of Labor in any material Degree, we Date from the Time that many Gentlemen among you commenced Bookbinding at their own Houses; being unacquainted with the Business themselves, they must have Workmen that could execute it at any Price; and it requires a Degree of Philosophy that few Journeymen Mechanics are possessed of, to withstand the offer of two or three Shillings a Week more Wages: the Consequence was, that they selected the best Hands from Men that had a greater Right to them, and stamped a Value on Labor which all our Efforts have not been able to remove. The second Cause originated from yourselves, by the Encouragement given to Men, unqualified for the Business, who were never able of themselves to bind a Book that would give any of you Satisfaction, but by an Assemblage of good Workmen at any Price, and we are sorry to say, by any Means, even by Seduction from other Masters, have been able to carry on a more extensive Business than most of us; and as a Proof of this second Cause, we would beg Leave to recommend to your Notice, the Price paid for Labor by Mr. Mackenley while he followed the Business. The third Cause, Gentlemen, we claim the Merit of ourselves, being willing to turn our Work out with every Advantage in our Power, and give Satisfaction to our respective Employers, we have employed proper Workmen at a greater Price than the Profits arising from our Business would afford, in order to execute your Work with Taste and Elegance, which we humbly hope will rather entitle us to your Thanks, than your Censure.

We beg Leave to submit to your Consideration a few Facts, which we are apprehensive have escaped your Notice. We can prove to you, beyond a Contradiction, that our Business with the present Prices, is not competent to a Maintenance of our Families; and it requires no great Discernment to discover, that even with the advanced Prices, we cannot make Provision for Losses, and the certain Distresses of old Age. Private Estimates have been taken both by Theory and Practice, upon which we build the above Assertion; but as all private Estimates, from the Nature of them, are liable to Objections, permit us

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to lay before you an Estimate of a more public Nature. It cannot be disputed, that Book-binding has arrived at a Degree of Perfection in the Course of the last sixteen Years, unknown to any former Period, both in the useful, as well as ornamental Part. More Books have been bound in it, than in twenty Years preceding it, and has produced Workmen in every Respect capable of doing Honor to the Business. We have seen, during that Time, a *Robinet*, a *Johnson*, a *Roger Payne*, and a *Baumgarten* arise in the Hemisphere of Book-binding; and although Men as capable to bind a Book as any given Number of Men in any Nation of Europe, have scarcely been able to dissipate the Darkness of their own Dwellings. Have they made Fortunes by their Business, although paid the largest Prices ever given in this Kingdom? no, Matters of Fact prove the contrary.

If we were to take a View of the two principal publishing Shops in Westminster, which we suppose to have paid a better Price than has been paid in the City, to their Binders, how many of their Binders have been capable of paying their just Debts for some Years past? Decency forbids the mentioning of Names, or else we might enumerate many unhappy Victims, who have been sacrificed to the Shrine of Bookbinding; and there appears but one *Exotic*, who is reported to have escaped the Sacrifice, by wisely withdrawing himself from the Trade, to shun the impending Ruin which threatens it.

The above two Shops referred to, have had their superior Advantages to most others; the one, on Account of the large Quantity of Work given out to their Binders, mostly of the same Sort of Books; and the other, in paying ready Money every Week for the Work done; both of which must, confessedly, be of great Benefit to the Workmen; and yet, with all these Advantages put together, but one has appeared to have succeeded, and he has prudently withdrawn from Business, as has already been observed, to escape the general Destruction; a plain Proof, that the Business is not worth following, or why not continue in it, with double the Advantage of most others?

Many of the foregoing Assertions are irrefragable Facts; and whether the Hardships we labor under arise from Dearth of Leather, or not, yet, our Grievances taken in the Aggregate, are insupportable; and, unless relieved by your kind Compliance with our reasonable Request, we must be exposed to Ruin, and in the End the Horrors of a Prison, not being paid a Price adequate to our Labor.

It is a discouraging Consideration, that most Tradesmen in other Branches of Business, inferior both in Ingenuity and Labor to ours, can get a comfortable Subsistence for their Families, with far less Expense and Fatigue, than a Master Bookbinder. The Laws of Nature forbid Men to be condemned to abject Slavery all their Days, without a wish to emancipate themselves from the dreadful Oar; and, as the Hope of Reward sweetens Labor, surely, Gentlemen, you would not wish to exclude us from that Hope, as there can be nothing so very ignominious in the Trade of a Bookbinder to merit such Exclusion.

We have, now, Gentlemen, laid before you our various Complaints, and have endeavored to answer and remove the Objections raised against our Conduct in addressing you upon the present Occasion; we hope, that we have shewn in a most conspicuous Light, that, after an unwearied and unremitted Attention to our Business for twenty, thirty, nay some of us for forty Years, or upwards, we have been scarcely able, and in numberless Instances not able, to discharge our lawful Debts. We therefore submit the Whole to your candid Consideration, at the same Time begging Pardon for the Prolixity of our Epistle, and flattering ourselves that you will not be deaf to our Intreaties, but exert the Power you possess, to put us on a Footing with other Tradesmen, that we may have, though with a distant Prospect, some Pleasure in looking forward towards the Eve of Life, when Age and bodily Infirmities will oblige us to cease from that Labor hitherto exerted in vain.

We are, GENTLEMEN,

With the greatest Respect,

Your most obedient and much obliged humble Servants,

November 1st, 1781.

The BOOKBINDERS of *London* and *Westminster*.